



METAPHORICAL DERIVATION AS A MECHANISM OF IDIOM POLYSEMY FORMATION IN ENGLISH, RUSSIAN, AND UZBEK

Valieva Nargizakhon Zamir kizi

**Teacher, Teaching English Methodology 3-Department
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
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ABSTRACT

The article examines metaphorical derivation as one of the principal mechanisms underlying the development of polysemy in idioms in English, Russian, and Uzbek. The relevance of the study is determined by the need to identify the cognitive and semantic processes through which an initial figurative representation develops into a system of interrelated meanings. The aim of the research is to identify the patterns of metaphorical derivation in polysemantic idioms and to determine the role of metaphorical transfer in the formation of their semantic structure. The study employs descriptive, semantic, componential, comparative, and linguocultural methods. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the initial figurative basis of an idiom and its derived meanings, as well as to the preservation and transformation of the underlying image during semantic development. The analysis demonstrates that metaphorical derivation contributes to the expansion of the semantic potential of idioms by transferring features from concrete experiential domains to abstract conceptual domains.

Idioms constitute an important component of the lexical and phraseological systems of a language. Their semantic structure reflects not only conventionalized patterns of figurative expression but also culturally and cognitively significant ways of conceptualizing human experience. Unlike free word combinations, idioms are characterized by semantic integrity, conventionality, and a certain degree of non-compositionality. At the same time, their meanings are not necessarily static. Many idiomatic expressions develop several interrelated meanings, thereby acquiring a polysemous semantic structure.

The development of polysemy in idioms is closely associated with mechanisms of semantic change. Among these mechanisms, metaphorization occupies a particularly significant position. Metaphor enables speakers to conceptualize abstract experiences through more concrete and familiar domains of experience. As a result, an image underlying an idiom may be extended beyond its initial semantic sphere and acquire additional meanings in new communicative and conceptual contexts.

Metaphorical development is especially important for idioms because figurative meaning is frequently based on a conceptual relationship between a concrete situation and an abstract state, action, quality, or social phenomenon. Once such a relationship becomes conventionalized, the corresponding idiomatic expression may acquire further semantic extensions. Consequently, metaphorization should not be viewed merely as a mechanism responsible for the emergence of an isolated figurative meaning. It can also function as a productive mechanism of semantic derivation through which the semantic potential of an idiom expands.

The study of metaphorical derivation is therefore particularly relevant to the investigation of idiom polysemy. A polysemous idiom may contain several meanings that are connected through a common metaphorical basis, while the degree of semantic distance between these meanings may vary considerably. In some cases, the original image remains transparent in all subsequent meanings; in others, only a particular feature of the initial image is preserved. In still other cases, the metaphorical motivation becomes considerably weakened as the derived meaning becomes conventionalized.

The comparative study of English, Russian, and Uzbek provides an opportunity to distinguish universal cognitive mechanisms from culturally specific patterns of semantic development. Speakers of different languages share many basic domains of physical and social experience, including the human body, movement, space, animals, nature, and interpersonal interaction. These domains frequently serve as sources for metaphorical conceptualization. Nevertheless, different linguistic communities may select different features of the same conceptual domain and develop them in different semantic directions.

Metaphorization is one of the most productive mechanisms through which language transforms concrete experience into abstract conceptual content. In phraseology, this mechanism acquires particular importance because the majority of idiomatic expressions are based on figurative reinterpretation of an original situation, action, object, or property. As a result, metaphor is not merely an expressive device but an essential factor in the formation and subsequent development of phraseological meaning.

From a cognitive perspective, metaphor can be understood as a conceptual mapping between two domains of experience. A relatively concrete and familiar source domain provides a conceptual structure through which a more abstract target domain is understood. This relationship is particularly evident in idioms, where physical actions, bodily experiences, spatial relations, and observable phenomena are frequently used to conceptualize emotions, interpersonal relations, intellectual activity, social behavior, and other abstract spheres.

The importance of metaphorization for phraseological semantics is determined by the fact that an idiom preserves traces of the conceptual structure from which its figurative meaning originated. Although the literal interpretation of the component words may no longer be relevant in actual communication, the underlying image can remain semantically significant. Consequently, the metaphorical basis of an idiom may serve as a link between its formal structure and its conventionalized meaning.

For example, the English idiom *break the ice* is based on a concrete physical image involving the breaking of ice. Its conventional meaning, however, refers to overcoming social

awkwardness and initiating communication. The semantic development can be represented as:

physical obstacle → removal of obstacle → overcoming social tension → beginning communication.

The metaphorical mapping therefore transfers the experience of overcoming a physical barrier into the domain of interpersonal communication. The concrete image remains recognizable, although its semantic function has been abstracted.

A similar mechanism can be observed in Russian phraseology. The expression *найти общий язык* ('to find a common language') is based on the concrete notion of having a shared means of verbal communication. Its idiomatic meaning refers to achieving mutual understanding or establishing successful interpersonal interaction. Here, the source domain of language as a means of communication is mapped onto the abstract domain of interpersonal understanding.

Comparable processes occur in Uzbek phraseology, although the particular images and their semantic extensions may reflect culturally specific patterns of conceptualization. This demonstrates that metaphorical semantic development combines two dimensions: a relatively universal cognitive mechanism and a language-specific realization of that mechanism.

The concept of metaphorization has been interpreted differently within traditional rhetoric, lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, and phraseology. In traditional linguistic descriptions, metaphor is generally associated with the transfer of a name from one object or phenomenon to another on the basis of similarity. Cognitive approaches have substantially broadened this understanding by treating metaphor as a mechanism of conceptualization rather than merely a stylistic phenomenon.

Within the cognitive approach, metaphorical transfer involves the systematic projection of selected characteristics of one conceptual domain onto another. Importantly, such a transfer does not reproduce the entire source domain. Instead, particular features are highlighted and become relevant to the interpretation of the target domain. This selective character of metaphorization is particularly important for explaining the development of polysemy in idioms.

The same figurative image may contain several potentially relevant features. During semantic development, one of these features can become especially prominent and motivate a new interpretation. Consequently, the metaphorical potential of an idiom is determined not only by its initial image but also by the possibility of extracting and reinterpreting individual components of that image.

For instance, a bodily image may initially evoke a physical action, but subsequent metaphorical development may focus on its intensity, direction, result, or emotional association. In this way, different semantic extensions may emerge from different aspects of the same underlying image.

This process can be represented schematically as:

Source domain → selected feature → conceptual mapping → target domain → conventionalized meaning.

When such a process occurs repeatedly, an idiomatic expression may acquire several related meanings. Thus, metaphorical transfer can become a mechanism of semantic expansion, transforming an originally monosemous idiom into a polysemous unit.

An important characteristic of metaphorical transfer is therefore its selectivity. Not every feature of the source domain is transferred to the target domain. Rather, the linguistic community selects those features that are cognitively salient and communicatively relevant. This explains why semantically related idioms in different languages may develop different meanings even when they are based on similar physical or experiential situations.

Metaphorization plays a central role in the formation of idiomatic meaning. A free word combination may initially describe a concrete situation, while repeated figurative use gradually establishes a conventionalized interpretation. As this interpretation becomes fixed within the language system, the expression acquires idiomatic status.

The development may be described as a gradual process:

literal combination → contextual figurative use → repeated metaphorical interpretation → conventionalized idiomatic meaning.

The conventionalization of metaphor does not necessarily eliminate the original image. In many cases, the image continues to provide motivation for the idiomatic meaning. However, the relationship between the literal and figurative levels may become less transparent over time.

This is particularly relevant to the study of polysemous idioms because an established metaphor can itself become the basis for further semantic development. Once a figurative meaning has become conventionalized, speakers may reinterpret the same expression in relation to another conceptual domain. The result is a second-order metaphorical process in which an already idiomatic expression develops a new meaning.

Therefore, it is useful to distinguish between metaphor as a source of initial idiomatization and metaphor as a mechanism of subsequent semantic derivation. The first process establishes the initial figurative meaning, whereas the second contributes to the expansion of the idiom's semantic structure.

This distinction is essential for the analysis of polysemy. If several meanings are simply listed without reconstructing the metaphorical relations between them, the internal organization of the idiom remains unexplained. A semantic approach, by contrast, makes it possible to determine whether a particular meaning represents a genuine derivative development or merely a contextual modification of the same semantic unit.

The relationship between metaphorization and polysemy is particularly evident in cases where several meanings of an idiom can be connected through a common conceptual image. In such instances, metaphorization functions as a mechanism of semantic branching.

The resulting structure is not necessarily linear. A single primary meaning may motivate several secondary meanings, each of which emphasizes a different feature of the original conceptual model. Alternatively, one secondary meaning may become the basis for another, producing a chain of semantic derivation.

The distinction between these two patterns is significant. In a radial model, several meanings develop from a common semantic center. In a chain model, meanings emerge

sequentially, with one derivative meaning providing the basis for the next. Both patterns can be observed in the semantic development of idiomatic expressions.

Another important factor is the degree of semantic distance between the meanings. When a derivative meaning preserves the central feature of the original metaphor, the connection between the meanings is relatively transparent. When several stages of semantic extension intervene, the metaphorical motivation becomes increasingly indirect.

This suggests that idiom polysemy should be viewed as a graded phenomenon. The relationship between meanings can range from close semantic proximity to substantial conceptual distance. Metaphorization contributes to this process by providing the mechanism through which the original conceptual structure is extended into new semantic domains.

The development of polysemy can therefore be understood as a process in which an idiom's initial metaphorical potential is progressively exploited by speakers. The more productive and cognitively salient the underlying image is, the greater the possibility that the idiom will acquire additional meanings.

At the same time, metaphorical productivity is influenced by cultural and linguistic factors. A particular image may possess a high degree of semantic potential in one language but a more restricted potential in another. Consequently, the comparison of English, Russian, and Uzbek idioms makes it possible to determine whether similar metaphorical mechanisms result in similar semantic structures or whether they lead to culturally specific developments.

Thus, metaphorization should be regarded as both a source of idiomaticity and a mechanism of semantic development. It establishes the connection between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, while its subsequent extensions contribute to the emergence of additional meanings. The analysis of these processes provides a theoretical basis for examining the metaphorical derivation of polysemous idioms in English, Russian, and Uzbek.

The analysis demonstrates that metaphorical derivation constitutes one of the principal mechanisms underlying the formation and development of idiom polysemy. Metaphorization does not function exclusively at the initial stage of idiom formation; it may continue to operate after an expression has acquired a conventionalized figurative meaning, providing a basis for the emergence of new semantic extensions.

The study shows that the development of polysemous idioms is determined by the interaction between an initial figurative model and the conceptual features selected for subsequent metaphorical transfer. In this process, the entire source image is not necessarily transferred to a new conceptual domain. More commonly, particular salient features are extracted, abstracted, and reinterpreted in relation to new objects, situations, or spheres of experience. This selective character of metaphorical transfer accounts for the gradual expansion of an idiom's semantic potential.

Several major patterns of metaphorical development can be distinguished. These include the transfer from physical experience to psychological and emotional domains, from physical actions to social interaction, from spatial relations to abstract states and evaluations, and from concrete objects or animal characteristics to human behavior and personal qualities. Such patterns demonstrate the fundamental role of embodied and experiential knowledge in the formation of idiomatic meanings.

The analysis also indicates that the semantic structure of polysemous idioms may develop according to either a **radial** or a **chain-like** model. In the radial model, several derived meanings are directly related to a common semantic center and preserve different features of the initial metaphorical structure. In the chain model, meanings emerge successively, with an intermediate meaning serving as the basis for further metaphorical extension. The distinction between these models makes it possible to describe the internal organization of idiom polysemy more precisely.

An important finding concerns the preservation and transformation of the initial figurative image. The relationship between an idiom and its metaphorical basis is not binary but gradual. In some cases, the original image remains transparent and continues to motivate the derived meaning. In other cases, only individual features of the image are retained, while its broader structure undergoes semantic transformation. With increasing conventionalization, the original metaphorical motivation may become less transparent, although the semantic relationship between the meanings may remain reconstructable.

The comparative perspective reveals a significant degree of similarity between English, Russian, and Uzbek in the cognitive mechanisms underlying metaphorical semantic development. Somatic, spatial, physical, animal-related, and activity-based domains are productive sources of metaphorical conceptualization across the three languages. This suggests that shared human experience provides a common cognitive foundation for the development of idiomatic polysemy.

At the same time, the realization of these mechanisms is not identical across the languages. Differences can be observed in the selection of salient metaphorical features, the direction of semantic extension, the evaluative component of meanings, and the degree of conventionalization. These differences reflect the influence of cultural experience and language-specific patterns of conceptualization. Thus, metaphorical derivation combines a universal cognitive basis with culturally determined modes of interpretation.

Overall, the findings support the view that idiom polysemy should be understood as a **dynamic process of semantic development rather than as a simple accumulation of independent meanings**. Metaphorical derivation provides continuity between the initial figurative basis and subsequent meanings while simultaneously allowing an idiom to expand its conceptual and communicative potential.

The comparative study of English, Russian, and Uzbek idioms therefore demonstrates that metaphorization serves as a connecting mechanism between **figurative representation, semantic derivation, cognitive conceptualization, and cultural experience**. Further research may focus on quantitative modelling of metaphorical derivation, the corpus-based investigation of semantic extensions, and the development of a more detailed typology of metaphorical models specific to each linguistic culture.

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